

Chairman Kerns and members of the House Agriculture Committee. I am Verdell Jackson Senate District 5 which includes Bigfork, Somers, Lakeside and Lower Kalispell. Today I bring you SB 343 which continues the Aquatic Species Program I started two years ago by a bill with the same number. What are the odds for that to happen.

The main purpose of this new program is to stop the Zebra mussel from infecting Montana's lakes and rivers.

THE REASON I SPONSORED SB 343

Three years ago the Flathead Lakers, 1500 members, contacted me and asked me to carry the AIS bill and they provided me with a draft. I agree because they convinced me that the Zebra and Quagga mussels would devastate our water bodies in Montana if they got started. I live on the Flathead River and have 4 lakes in my district, Flathead Lake, Echo Lake, Foy's Lake and Swan Lake.

While working on the bill, I was contacted by the Agriculture Department and the Governor's office. They assisted me in producing the final draft of the bill. Funding was placed in the Governor's budget.

THE REASON THE AIS PROGRAM IS IN AGRICULTURE

The reason the invasive species program was put in the Agriculture two years ago was that the program was a new program with the purpose of preventing the Zebra and Quagga mussels from infecting Montana's lakes and rivers. Fish, wildlife and Parks has had an AIS program for 6 years, but they concentrated on the water bodies. I had not heard of the Zebra mussel until the Flathead Lakers contacted me two years ago. These mussels once started would cause extensive damage to irrigation equipment, power plants and our fisheries. The emphasis of this program is on border check stations which are handled by Ag. They also check for Aquatic invasive weeds such as Eurasian Water Milfoil.

The first line of defense to prevent infection of our water was to make the public aware that the mussels were going to come from boats that had been used in infected water. The public information program has been extensive. Newspaper articles, radio, bill boards, mailings, brochures, AIS signs, bumper stickers, posters, training sessions, classroom presentations and conferences have made the entire state aware of the risks. The Flathead Lakers, one of the many stakeholder groups involved, has 1500 members. They have featured the mussel problem in most of their newsletters during the last two years. Also, many of their members have volunteered to help put up AIS signs and other activities. Brochures are being distributed by weed districts, conservation districts, tribes, extension services, and many other agencies. I believe that the Agriculture Department has done a great job of educating the public by effective use of the media and communicating with hundreds of people who make up the stakeholder groups. They have gained their support and help. This is the first line of defense. Ideally everyone connected with boating will inspect their boats and others will look twice when they see a boat parked or being towed.

The second line of defense was to check boats and recreation vehicles at Montana borders. The Agriculture Department set up 18 voluntary roving border inspection stations around the state in such places as Eureka, Troy, Dene Mora, Lime, Bridger, Broadus, Wibaux, Sidney, Fort Peck, West

Yellowstone, Sweetgrass, Chief Joseph Pass, etc. These check stations were voluntary, not mandatory. Boats were checked for both mussels and aquatic plants.

The third line of defense, to begin after this session, is to designate Montana a statewide management area using authority given in SB 343. This will allow mandatory check stations to be set up on roads likely to have boats entering Montana from mussel infected states. Also, we can lay the ground work to get a presence at the border crossing stations and park entrances. With the support of the Governor's office and the department of Transportation, we can involve the staff at the border crossings and park entrances as well as police officers. We have contacted the Department of Transportation and they have agreed to work with us on setting up inspection stations at border crossings and weigh stations. Also, we plan to contact the parks to distribute literature and see if boats that come into the parks can be checked.

We will be working to make this program self funded through a fee to boat owners and grants from the power companies by next session. Lastly we are stepping our involvement and communication with surrounding states.

The coordination was a problem in the beginning, but I am now confident that the problems have been worked out and will be reflected in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the Departments of Agriculture, Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Natural Resources and the governor's office.

The program needs separation from "business as usual" for the time being.

1. Program started in Agriculture and needs to stay there to maintain the focus on this new program. The program is thriving in Agriculture and has gone statewide to set up a defense against importation of Invasive mussels and aquatic plants.
2. SB 343 is a bill molded by stakeholders. They are on board to assist with the efforts.
3. Needs accountability. Coordination language is in SB343 & in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Includes reporting and accountability.
4. Needs to be cost effective.
5. Meetings, training and workshops that stockholders and I attend are very effective.

SUMMARY OF SB 343

SB 343 continues the Aquatic Invasive Species program, provides funding and makes statute changes to implement the next phase of the program. The statute changes are necessary implement mandatory check stations and many other components of the program.

SB 343 this session has 52 co-sponsors. It passed out of Senate Agriculture 11-0 as amended, had second and third reading in the Senate, passed 44-6 and then was sent to Senate Finance and Claims where it passed out 18-1. The bill came back to the Senate and passed out 45-4 and has been sent to House Ag.



LEGISLATION SETS UP PREVENTION CAMPAIGN FOR ZEBRA AND QUAGGA MUSSELS

Jackson's Bill Fights Invasive Mussels

By Dan Testa, 3-06-09

Kalispell Republican Sen. Verdel Jackson was at work this morning making his case before the Senate Finance and Claims Committee that his bill to fight two invasive mussel species is worth its price tag of more than \$330,000 a year. Jackson's Senate Bill 343, titled, "The Montana Invasive Species Act," would establish a statewide, comprehensive, aquatic invasive species plan involving education and awareness, prevention and emergency response procedures, check stations, setting up management areas, and other measures.

The species at issue are the quagga mussel and zebra mussel, invasive freshwater bivalves brought over to North America from the Black and Caspian Seas.

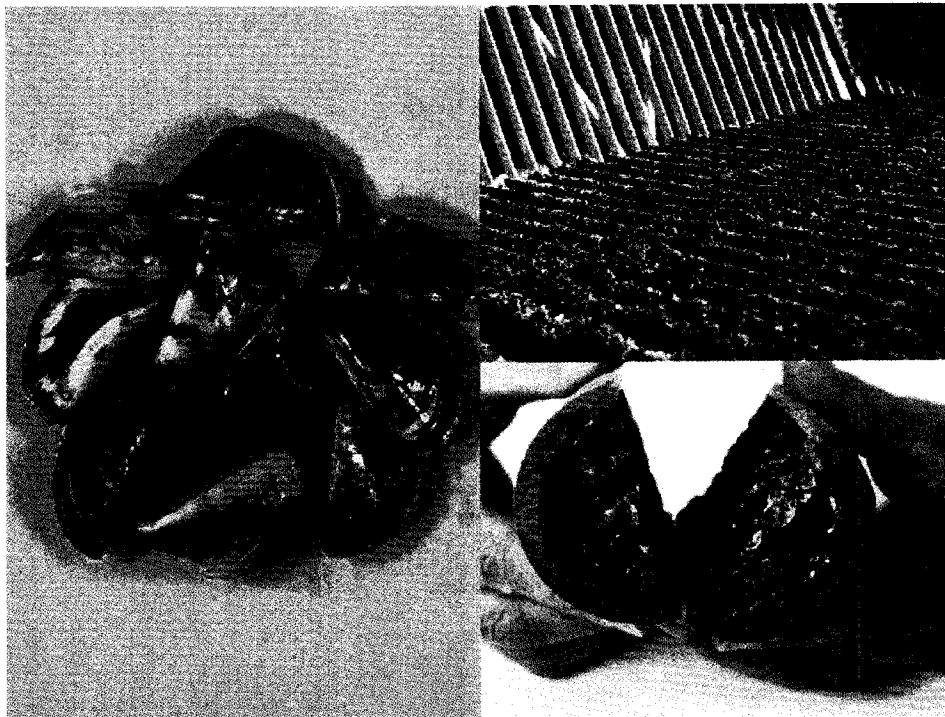
These mussels have no natural predators, and they reproduce so rapidly that they can quickly encrust just about anything, from drainage pipes, to boat cooling systems. They even attach to native mussels and other aquatic life, killing them. These mussels have infested much of the Mississippi River drainage and Great Lakes, but Jackson's bill, brought at the request of the Flathead Lakers, is a part of the "100th Meridian Initiative," a partnership among government agencies and water quality groups to prevent the zebra and quagga mussels from spreading into the western half of the United States.

None of these mussels have turned up in Montana yet, but Jackson said he is concerned it's only a matter of time until a fishing tournament or other recreational activity here draws some boats from midwestern lakes with these mussels or their microscopic larvae stuck to its hull or hidden somewhere on a piece of equipment.

"Without the cooperation of the general boating public, we won't be successful," Jackson said. "We want to get everybody watching for these mussels because they're easy to see."

Jackson's bill would run management of the mussel prevention program through the Department of Agriculture, and its price tag includes the cost of two new employees to tackle the issue. Signs would be erected at boating ramps across the state, along with other educational initiatives to raise awareness of the mussel problem and how to identify them. Inspectors would check watercraft at all fishing events, especially out-of-state boats. If there was an infestation somewhere, a management area would be established to stop it, and the bill would give the governor the ability to exercise his emergency powers to deal with the problem.

While he concedes the bill is pricey, Jackson questions whether it will be enough to combat the mussels, should they turn up in Montana. But in working on the bill, Jackson said some private sector businesses have expressed a willingness to help out on the prevention effort.



Caption: Photos from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

"I've heard some indications that there is interest from people to donate to this fund," Jackson said. "Power companies could have an expensive clean-up bill on their equipment if these mussels get established."

The bill passed the Senate overwhelmingly with 47 votes and would be included in the general fund budget, depending on what the Senate Finance and Claims Committee decides.

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